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ABSTRACT

In reviewing the ancient, well-worn debate on the relationship between literature and values, it may be seen that the current pedagogical theory of developing response to literature is parallel to the argument for helping students articulate their own values. Two approaches to clarifying values are the values clarification approach (Louis Raths, Merrill Harmon, and Sidney Simon) and the moral development approach (Lawrence Kohlberg). The goal of values clarification activities, in which students choose among options on rating scales, values continuums, value statements, etc., is to help students become aware of their own values. Kohlberg's approach, based on a theory of logical and cognitive development, defines six stages of moral reasoning as bases for student development from one stage to a higher one. Both of these approaches suggest a number of ways for helping students gain an awareness of their own values and of the processes of moral reasoning in responding to literature. (JM)

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On Literature and Values

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CS202 507

On Literature and Values

Since Plato's concern with the distorting, corrupting influence of art, the relationship between literature and values has always been a subject of much debate. I would like to briefly review justifications of literature to teach values; two recent proposals for teaching values--Values Clarification and the Kohlberg strategies; and then propose some techniques for helping students think about their own values in relationship to their reading.

Much of American education in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century has been devoted to teaching values, either through direct didactic preachments: this is right/ this is wrong, or, indirectly through the experience of schooling--the rules or assumptions governing conduct in the schools. Students learned the values of obedience, punctuality, "getting ahead" through hard work, and "devotion to the team" not only because they were told that these were important but also because they learned to think and to reason about their school experience from the reasoning provided by the school.

Within this context of subtle and not so subtle socialization, the most common justification for teaching literature was that literature imparted those values consistent with the larger pattern of socialization.

Literature could be endowed with such an enobling influence because in a small town, rural America without television, without easily available paperback books or Playboy magazine on grocery check-out counters, literature often served as the only window to the outside world. The schools could chose those books portraying only values consistent with the school's values. The students didn't object because they didn't really know of books portraying alternative values, materials such

as underground newspapers or Lenny Bruce in paperback. Even popular pulp fiction that was available tended to reinforce the school's values.

Much of literature instruction was devoted to inferring the appropriate didactic message of the works read.

Then, in the 50's and 60's, the heavy emphasis on the didactic function of literature began to change. The increased use of critical analysis, particularly New Criticism, focused more attention on each work as an autonomous verbal structure requiring careful, detached, objective analysis. With the growth of television and the paperback, students were exposed to a far wider range of value options than in the past so that they began to recognize the traditional required books as reflecting parochial values. "Irrelevant" became the catch-word of the late sixties.

In the 50's and 60's, a reexamination of the school's function in society brought a greater emphasis on teaching knowledge and skills, particularly in science; with this academic preparation of students, inculcating values continued but assumed a more narrow focus, a focus on those values associated with academic success, science, and getting to the moon.

In the 70's, the notion of the schools directly or indirectly teaching values has come under heavy attack. Some educators, such as Carl Berieter, argue that the business of the schools is to teach skills and that they should totally dispense with teaching values. Others argue that because society and family in the 70's have failed to provide viable ethical guidelines, that the schools have an obligation to provide moral education, but they object to the methods of direct inculcation of values. They argue that direct inculcation of values through didactic lessons, models of behavior, or school rules

was never really effective. Students perceived double standards between teachers saying one thing and doing something else or between abstractions about behavior and actual behavior. They argue that students should be allowed to articulate their own values.

The argument for helping students articulate their own values has strong parallels with current pedagogical theory of developing response to literature. That theory suggests that a goal of literature instruction should be to help students formulate and trust their own responses and to recognize differences and similarities between their responses and other students' responses.[1]

Within this context, it is important that the student understand some reasons for his responses, reasons not only within the work but also within himself or herself. Responses reflect the transaction between the students' values and the values portrayed in the work. The goal is that the students understand how their values and the values portrayed in the work both influence their responses.

There are a number of different approaches to dealing with the process of clarifying values, and some disagreement as to the validity of these approaches. Two positions will be summarized, that of Raths, Harmin, and Simon--the Values Clarification approach, and the approach of Lawrence Kohlberg--the Moral Development approach.

Most of you are probably familiar with Values Clarification theory and activities. The goal of Values Clarification activities, in which students choose among options on rating scales, values continuums, value statements, etc. is to help students become aware of their own values.[2] By becoming aware of their own values, it is hoped that students who are inconsistent, ambiguous, lacking in purpose or self-confidence will become more consistent, purposeful, and self-confident.

Values Clarification techniques certainly engage students in open-ended, student-centered activities. Moreover, helping students gain awareness of their own values is certainly an honorable goal. However, there are a number a criticisms of Values Clarification that merit attention.

Kohlberg has argued that developing awareness of values as an end is insufficient; that students need some direction in their moral education.[3] He is disturbed by the moral relativism of Values Clarification theory--that there is no one "right" moral answer; Kohlberg argues that some answers are more moral than others. He also believes that moral education in the school should deal primarily with justice or civic education--that the schools should not deal with values outside of this area.

In one of a recent series of articles in Phi Delta Kappan on moral education, John Stewart criticizes Values Clarification's focus on the content of values--the "what" a student chooses--rather than on the structure of valuing or moral reasoning--the "why" or the reasoning behind choosing an action.[4] Stewart is also concerned that peer pressure influences the public affirmation of value choices, that the extreme choices are often so unpopular or emotionally loaded ("Virginal Virgin" vs. "Mattress Millie") that they become a "coercion to the mean." He also points to the contradiction in arguing for value neutrality while citing their own "bag of virtues," consistency, certainty, self-confidence, assertiveness as desirable goals.

Kohlberg's moral development approach is based on a theory of logical and cognitive development. He argues that moral education should deal with the process or structure of moral reasoning--the reasoning people employ in their moral thinking. He has defined six stages of moral reasoning that could serve as the basis for helping students develop

from one stage to a higher stage in their reasoning.[5]

The following chart briefly outlines these six stages. The descriptions of the stages represent a rewording of Kohlberg's category descriptions by Professor James Mackey who has worked extensively with the Kohlberg system.[6]

Reasoning at the Preconventional level involves labels of good and bad that are interpreted either in terms of the consequences of action--punishment, reward, or favors, or in terms of physical power. The student reasoning at Stage 1 is concerned primarily with the physical consequences of action, avoiding punishment. In Stage 2 reasoning, right action is that which satisfies one's own needs; actions are conceived of in terms of pragmatic payoff.

Reasoning at the Conventional level considers action in terms of conformity to the group--maintaining the family, peer group, or nation as valuable in its own right, regardless of the consequences. A student reasoning at Stage 3 views action as that which pleases others, earning approval for being "nice." Stage 4 reasoning is a "law and order" orientation towards authority, fixed rules, doing one's duty, maintaining the social order.

Reasoning at the Postconventional or Principled level considers actions according to moral values and principles. At Stage 5, the student reasons on the basis of laws, individual rights, and standards agreed upon by society for the greatest good. At Stage 6, the student understands the philosophical principles behind systems of law, principles of justice, equality, and human dignity.

Kohlberg claims that only a small percentage of the population reach stages 5 and 6. Most adolescents' reasoning occurs on stages 2, 3, and 4; students at the junior high level reason primarily at stage 3, reasoning based on group or peer norms.

Some of the best literary examples of reasoning at stages 2, 3, and 4 are found in Catch-22. Because the reasoning in that novel is absurd and satiric, it would be interesting for students to contrast their own reasons for making choices if they were in the shoes of the characters with the reasons given by the characters in Catch-22.

The "catch" in Catch-22 is "specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of danger that was real and immediate was the process of a rational mind"[7]--Stage 1 reasoning. Catch-22 also dictates that "you've always got to do what your commanding officer tells you to,"[8] Stage 4 "law and order" reasoning. Milo Minderbinder argues that any act conducted by the syndicate is justified because "What's good for the syndicate is good for the country,"[9] Stage 3, maintaining the group regardless of the consequences. Only Yossarian occasionally transcends the preconventional and convention levels; when faced with a choice of assisting in a murder or faced with a murder, he argues that murder is both legally and morally wrong.[10]

These stages could be used to work with various responses to literature that reflect different levels of reasoning. For example, the students are discussing the play, The Crucible, by Arthur Miller. They are at a certain point in the play in which John Proctor must make a decision and they do not know what he will decide.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the play, The Crucible, let me summarize Proctor's moral dilemma:

> In Salem, Massachusetts in 1692, numerous upstanding citizens are being accused of witchcraft by a group of young girls led by Abigail Williams. The laws of the church and state require that anyone accused of witchcraft be tried and hanged unless they confess and identify the person who brought them to the devil.
>
> John Proctor, a farmer and respected citizen, was told by Abigail that the girls were accusing people only to save themselves from punishment for dancing in the forest, information that, if revealed, could be damaging to Abigail. Abigail has also confided to John that even though their previous affair is over, that she still loves him and wants to eliminate his wife, Elizabeth, by accusing her of witchcraft.

> Knowing that several innocent people are being accused, John must decide whether to tell Reverend Hale and the other officials what he knows about the group of young girls. However, if he talks, Abigail may tell the community about their affair, which would mean that he would lose his respectability.

The accompanying chart lists some possible student reasons that could be attributed to a prediction that Proctor should tell Hale about the girls.

As with Values Clarification, there have been a number of criticisms of Kohlberg's approach. Richard Peters, in the same Phi Delta Kappan previously mentioned, argues that Kohlberg's hierarchy of stages with principles of justice or equality contains its own form of morality.[11] Michael Scriven adds that there is no proof from a research perspective that the lower stages are morally wrong.[12] Kurtines and Grief have attacked the fact that the stages have not been thoroughly validated or tested by reliability when used in research.[12a]

Despite the assets and liabilities of Values Clarification and the Kohlberg approach, both suggest some ideas for helping students not only gain an awareness of their own values but also the processes of moral reasoning in responding to literature.

Both approaches stress the importance of beginning with the student's values--in Kohlberg's case, with the student's present level of moral reasoning. Appreciating the fact that students bring different value systems and levels of moral reasoning to their reading and classroom discussions is important. The traditional justification for teaching literature, that of changing or improving values, assumed that reading literature could change values and that students would all change in the same desired direction.

I recently reviewed some thirty experimental studies of the effects of reading or teaching literature on changing attitudes. Most of the

Possible Student Reasons at Each of the Levels

of Moral Development in the Kohlberg Scheme

		John Proctor decides to tell the officials that the young girls are lying because:
Preconventional Level		
Stage 1	Avoiding punishment	...he is no longer afraid of being punished for his affair with Abigail
Stage 2	Doing what you have to to get what you want	...he wants to earn a monetary reward
Conventional Level		
Stage 3	Getting along with the values of your own group	...he wants to improve his status in the community
Stage 4	Following all the rules of the society	...he feels it's his duty to tell all he knows to any church official
Postconventional or Principled Level		
Stage 5	Seeing laws as agreements that lead to the greatest good	...he believes that telling will help assure the people accused a fair trial
Stage 6	Understanding philosophical principles behind systems of laws	...he believes that the girls' act of lying is morally wrong and a violation of the accused peoples' individual freedom

studies examined the effects of reading certain types of books on short-term change in attitudes, attitudes towards minorites. In a majority of the studies--the majority including the better designed studies--there was no change in attitudes. In one study, readers judged as highly prejudiced became even more prejudiced after reading about racial problems.

This suggests that reading literature is unlikely to have much effect on attitudes, or, values, which are even more stable than attitudes. Readers' values are largely formed by family, peers, and the culture. It is therefore important that students be aware of those values that they bring to a work in order to understand how their values or levels of reasoning are influencing their responses.

Dissonance is an important concept suggested by Kohlberg's stage theory. By creating dissonance between the student's present stage and a higher stage, the student may realize the weaknesses of his present level and attempt to change to a higher level. Similarly, research has found that when teachers rate themselves favorably on their teaching ability but receive unfavorable ratings from students, dissonance is created, resulting in teacher attempts to improve their teaching ability.

Similarly, the literary experience involves dissonance. One of the unfortunate public conceptions is that literature is primarily entertainment, a happy, soothing Geritol trip. Certainly much of the literature students experience, particularly the poorly written adolescent novels and commercial TV drama simply reinforce values. However, much of literature challenges the values of society and often the values of the reader.

Dissonance between the reader's values and the values portrayed in the work creates a value conflict between work and reader. We are most aware of our own values when they conflict with other values or higher/

lower levels of moral reasoning.

There are a number of different types of conflict that could occur in the literary experience: (1) When the reader empathizes or identifies with a speaker, narrator, or character, the reader assumes the value perspective or the level of moral reasoning of the speaker, narrator, or character. The reader then may recognize a gap between his or her own values or level of moral reasoning and that of the speaker, narrator or character. This is particularly interesting in a long novel in which the narrator or character changes in values or levels of moral reasoning. An adolescent may perceive little difference between the conventional levels of a narrator's or character's moral reasoning, stages 3 and 4, but when the narrator or character begins to develop principles of justice often contrary to that of the community, the gap between reader and narrator/character begins to grow. You often hear this when a student says, "But, I just don't understand why he would sacrifice himself," referring to the protagonist in A Man for All Seasons, J.B., or Invisible Man.

(2) Much of literature is based on value conflict between characters. A reader may favor the values of one character in conflict with another character, creating dissonance between the reader and the other character.

(3) The reader is constantly looking ahead--predicting what should happen, based on his/her values. Readers draw upon a vast storehouse of storylines for conceiving of their own lives or making literary predictions, storylines fraught with values, ie. everyone should try to get as much schooling as possible in order to go on and be a success; a woman ought to find a man and get married. When things don't turn out as expected--when the character doesn't go off to school or the woman rejects marriage for a career, a conflict occurs between the

reader's prediction and the actual outcome, or, more importantly, between the reasoning behind the reader's prediction and the reasoning behind the character's alternate actions.

(4) Assuming that readers are able and willing to respond openly and honestly to their reading, conflicts occur between readers' responses, responses that reflect difference in values or levels of moral reasoning.

Another important contribution of Kohlberg is the concept of the process of moral reasoning (versus the content or choice made) as central to moral education. Simply because a student publicly affirms a special value in class on Tuesday and Thursday does not necessarily mean that value will carry over to his actual decision making. Dealing with the logical processes of value decision-making will transfer far more effectively to responding to other works and to actual decision making than simply knowing that one prefers one value over another.

However, the emotional side of moral reasoning should not be ignored. The ability to recognize and interpret the other people's feelings about their behavior is vital to understanding the differences between one's own perspective and another's perspective. Discussions about values often fail because students lack the ability to empathize with another student's or even a character's perspective, and to recognize that perspective or mode of moral reasoning as distinct from their own. Students egocentrically project their own values and feelings onto others, smothering recognition of conflict. Knowing how George, in Of Mice and Men, feels about Lenny--how much he cares for Lenny--as opposed to what the student thinks George should feel about Lenny or the student's own feelings about Lenny--is helpful in appreciating George's moral action.

Based on these assumptions--that students bring different values

to their reading and discussing; that students recognize their own values most readily when their values conflict with another's; that focusing on the process of moral reasoning transfers more readily to other experiences than simply focusing on the content of values; and that feelings are an important part of moral reasoning--I would like to suggest some specific activities incorporating Values Clarification, Kohlberg, and a modification of some questioning techniques suggested by a social studies educator, Jack Fraenkel,[13]

These activities are based on students learning to use a series of questions. By learning to pose their own questions, students learn to articulate their responses not simply to please the teacher but to explore their own feelings and values.

The first set of questions focus on What happened? or What should happen? in regard to a speaker's, narrator's, or character's actions or predicted actions. Two related questions are What did I and what did (would) the character feel about this action? and What did other students feel about this action? These questions require the students to define the nature of the event, the speaker's or character's feelings about the event, and understand (and, in some cases, restate) other students' feelings about the event. This as a relatively straightforward, but important clarifying stage so that students are clear about the nature of the event under discussion.

The next set of questions involve the reasons for actions: What is a reason(s) for this action? This would include a reason stated by a character, or, if none were stated, a reason(s) attributed to the character based on the student's knowledge of the character; (2) reason(s) I would give for doing/not doing the same thing: (3) reason(s) other students gave for doing/not doing the same thing; and (4) feelings about these reasons or differences in reasons.

Dealing with reasons for action is central to discussion of either the values implied by action or the levels of moral reasoning implicit in the reasons given.

These questions on reasons invite potential value conflict or realization of the different levels of moral reasoning. The reasons stated by or attributed to a character may conflict with the student's own reasons which in turn, may conflict with another student's reasons.

The third set of questions involves two groups of questions. If the teacher and/or the students are familiar with Kohlberg's levels of moral reasoning, then they could examine the reasons cited and ask the question: What is the stage of reasoning of (1) the character's reasoning, (2) my reasoning, and (3) other students' or teacher's reasoning? This would require some instruction for students; the students would have to not only be sophisticated enough to grasp the concept of developmental stages but also cognitively and morally advanced enough to conceptually grasp all six stages.

If the students did not know the stages, the teacher could still use the stages as a basis for posing questions about the differences between a character's reasoning and the student's reasoning. For example, students are role-playing a modification of the short story and film, The Lottery. Several students are arguing that the lottery should be stopped. One student says that the lottery should be stopped because other communities were stopping the lottery and these other communities, viewing their community as old fashioned, stopped trading with them. Another student argues that killing was a violation of the law which must be followed. A third student argues that the killing without reason violated the individual's rights to a trial. The teacher could then pose questions as to the basis for the differences in the students' reasoning, citing analogous situations or the consequences of

such reasoning for similar situations. The Kohlberg advocates claim that students will intuit the validity of the next highest stage; they also cite research indicating that students, given enough work with moral dilemmas, will advance.

Another alternative to using the Kohlberg system is to simply discuss those values implied by the reasoning. In some cases, the reasons may have been stated in the form of a value statement; for example, "Men like Invisible Man should be punished by society because society ought to punish people who do not contribute to society." is already stated in the form of a value statement. However, the students could further discuss the values implied by such a statement, that the student valued the community. Another student may argue that Invisible Man should reject society because the people should have a right to do what they want in life. Students could then discuss which of these values they consider most important: the community or people's right to do what they want, and then which values most people consider as most important.

In learning to infer their own or a character's values from reasoning, students could focus on particular cues that suggest certain values. One set of cues previously mentioned was the storylines by which people conceive of experience. In his second Inaugural Address, Richard Nixon conceived of becoming the President in terms of a Horatio Alger "rags to riches" story in which respect for hard work paid off in success. Students could consider some of the values implied by such stories, particularly the storyline conceptions in their own reasoning.

Students could also focus on the metaphors employed in reasoning. Metaphors reflect cultural values. In a culture that values power through organization, the military, the government, and team sports are

conceived of as synonymous, reflected in metaphors such as "team play," "game plan," "winning combination."

One of the more interesting sets of cues implying values are speech-acts, those actions performed by our words according to certain conventions. Speech acts include acts of ordering, requesting, pledging, inviting, promising, proclaiming. Characters and relationships between characters are created by, among other things, the speech acts they perform; we often have only the dialogue of a character on which to infer the nature of a character or a character's relationship with another character.

The types of speech acts performed reflects the characters' values. A character who is constantly bragging, boasting, proclaiming his worth suggest that he values himself; a character who is constantly ordering, demanding, pestering would seem to value his power.

These are just a few of many cues students could focus on in inferring values. A key question in all of this would be how certain values become associated with certain cues, how for example, certain values become associated with certain storylines, metaphors, or speech acts, and the reasons for using certain storylines, metaphors, or speech acts.

In closing, most of my discussion has revolved around the reason-giving side of value choices. I would be a poor reader of contemporary literature if I did not admit to the limits of reason. In the worlds of Pynchon, Pinter, Beckett, Barth, Albee, Vonnegut, it is difficult to find reason, just as it is difficult to find reason in our own

world of political wheeling and dealing, violence, and the bomb.

One result of discussing both contemporary fiction and film may be that students discover that there are no reasons for action; that in the irrational, absurd fictional worlds that may or may not reflect our own world, there is no underlying, supporting basis to support reason. Thus students in droves turn to worlds of fantasy and science fiction, worlds ironically, with some constructed rational basis. From the discovery of lack of reason I would hope that students would perceive a need to reexamine the basis for action in our culture and begin to create a new moral framework.

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